

Second, the bill would require disclosure of gender-specific health information that is already being reported to the Federal Government. We already have many agencies that are collecting the information based on gender, but they don't disseminate or analyze the gender differences. This bill would release that information so it could be studied and important health trends in women could be detected.

Lastly, the bill would authorize the expansion of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's WISEWOMAN program. WISEWOMAN is the acronym for the Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation For Women Across the Nation program. The WISEWOMAN program provides free heart disease and stroke screening to low-income, uninsured women. But the program currently is limited to 14 States. In the State of Alaska, we are fortunate to have two WISEWOMAN program sites, and these programs screen for high blood pressure, cholesterol, and glucose in Native Alaskan women, and they have been providing invaluable counseling on diet and exercise. One program in Alaska has successfully screened 1,437 Native Alaskan women and has provided them with culturally appropriate intervention programs that have truly produced life-saving results.

Heart disease, stroke, and other cardiovascular diseases cost Americans more than any other disease—an estimated \$403 billion in 2006, including more than \$250 billion in direct medical costs. We as a Nation can control these costs. Prevention through early detection is the most cost-effective way to combat the disease.

A few days ago we celebrated Valentine's Day, and we saw images of hearts then and we are still seeing them around now. We shouldn't forget that the heart is more than a symbol—it is a vital organ that can't be taken for granted. Coronary disease can be treated effectively, and sometimes even prevented. It does not have to be the No. 1 cause of death in women, and that is why I encourage my colleagues to support the HEART for Women Act.

COMMONSENSE GUN SAFETY LAWS SAVE LIVES

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, an analysis by the Violence Policy Center, VPC, of the most recent data available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, revealed that the national per capita death rate from guns was 10.36 people per 100,000 in 2003. In addition, 10 States had per capita gun death rates of more than 15 gun deaths per 100,000 people. Not coincidentally, the States with the highest per capita gun death rates also have some of the most lax gun safety laws in the country. This is further evidence that commonsense gun safety laws do save lives.

Each year the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence produces a "Gun

Violence Report Card" in which it assigns individual States a grade on their gun safety laws of A through F. In its analysis, the Brady campaign evaluates State gun safety laws on factors such as: whether it is illegal for a child to possess a gun without supervision; whether it is illegal to sell a gun to a child; whether gun owners are held responsible for leaving loaded guns easily accessible to children; whether guns are required to have child-safety locks, loaded-chamber indicators and other childproof designs; whether cities and counties have authority to enact local gun safety laws; whether background checks are required at gun shows and between private parties; and, whether it is legal to carry concealed handguns in public.

When the analysis of the CDC gun death data for 2003 is compared with the Brady campaign's report card for the same year, we find that the States with the lowest rates of gun deaths also received the highest grades from the Brady campaign. In fact, four of the five States with the lowest gun death rates received an "A-," the highest grade awarded by the Brady campaign that year, and the fifth received a "B-." These five States had an average rate of 3.81 gun deaths per 100,000 people, less than half of the national average. Conversely, four of the five States with the highest rates of gun deaths received an "F," while the fifth received a "D-." These five States had an average rate of 17.9 gun deaths per 100,000 people.

According to the Brady campaign, none of the top 15 States with the highest rates of gun deaths have laws requiring background checks on guns purchased at gun shows or from private sellers. Under current Federal law, when an individual buys a firearm from a licensed dealer, there are requirements for a background check to ensure that the purchaser is not prohibited by law from purchasing or possessing a firearm. However, this is not the case for all gun purchases. For example, when an individual wants to buy a firearm from a private citizen who is not a licensed gun dealer, there is no Federal requirement that the seller ensure that the purchaser is not in a prohibited category. This creates a loophole in the Federal law, providing prohibited purchasers, including convicted criminals, with potential easy access to dangerous firearms. Fortunately, some States, including the five with the lowest rates of gun deaths, have enacted laws to help close this loophole.

Congress should work to enact national gun safety standards, including mandatory background checks on all gun sales, to help reduce the high rate of gun deaths across the country. The States who have already enacted commonsense gun safety legislation have shown that their laws make a difference and we should follow their lead.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, Thomas Jefferson called religious freedom the "first freedom." As founder and leader over the last 3 years of the Congressional Working Group on Religious Freedom, I wanted to take this opportunity to pay tribute to this pivotal liberty. Last month, President Bush also recognized this important freedom by declaring "Religious Freedom Day," observed on January 16.

Americans are among the most religious peoples on Earth and are of many faith traditions. Nearly 80 percent of Americans state they pray regularly. Within a few blocks of this Capitol, there are churches, meeting houses, synagogues, mosques, temples, and house of worship of every variety.

The free exercise of religion is a hallmark of our Nation. It is the reason many of our ancestors came here. It is the reason we are able to live peacefully together as a religiously diverse people. Cherished by the American people as the most precious of those rights given by God, religious freedom has been given the pride of place in our Constitution, in the first clause of the first amendment of the Bill of Rights.

Freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief, as Jefferson and the American Founders recognized, is the prerequisite for the exercise of other basic human rights. Freedom of speech, press, and assembly depend on a free conscience. No basic freedom can be secure where religious freedom is denied.

But these rights do not just belong to Americans. They are universal; they belong to every person in this world. No one, from the worst dictator to the most powerful government, can take away the right for a person to believe as he or she wishes. However, the expression of this belief is too often repressed through the imposition of persecution and death.

Since the Nazi Holocaust against the Jewish people, the principle of religious freedom has gained recognition in foreign policy. The right to religious freedom found worldwide acceptance in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which many nations have agreed. "Everyone," the declaration asserts, "has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion." As the declaration makes explicit, "this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

The declaration's article 18 thus provides for the acceptance of religious pluralism; the freedom to convert to another faith; the right to express unorthodox beliefs in one's individual capacity; the right, not only to worship in private or behind the walls of a building but to express one's faith in society. These are powerful concepts that challenge many societies, including at times our own.

For example, I have introduced the Workplace Religious Freedom Act, a

bill which would restore a balanced approach to religious freedom in the workplace. It would clarify current law, which requires employers to accommodate the religious beliefs of their employees, unless doing so would cause significant difficulty or financial hardship for the employer. While most employers recognize the value of respecting religion in the workplace, sometimes employees are forced to choose between dedication to the principles of their faith and losing their job because their employers refuse to reasonably accommodate certain needs. It is supported by a broad spectrum of groups, liberal and conservative, who share this Nation's commitment to the freedom of conscience.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, which I supported, institutionalized religious freedom as a guiding doctrine in America's foreign relations. The act established within the State Department an office, headed by an Ambassador-at-Large, to monitor and report annually on the status of religious freedom in every country; and it created the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom as an independent Government agency to study and propose new policies to advance religious freedom abroad.

Because of this legislation, regular reports are being issued by the State Department on the status of religious freedom in every country. Citizens now have access to information not easily available previously. The U.S. Government is now designating countries as being of particular concern solely because of their records on religious freedom. While more actions can be taken, our Government is making this freedom a priority.

The founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, and many others fled to this land seeking religious freedom. Centuries later, the United States remains a beacon for the religiously repressed around the world. Our Congressional Working Group on Religious Freedom includes persons from diverse countries and faith backgrounds who have found religious freedom in America and who now dedicate their lives to speaking out for the persecuted around the world.

A regular participant in our Working Group is Ali Alyami. Dr. Alyami is a Muslim from Saudi Arabia, but he is not a follower of Wahhabism, the extremist, state-sanctioned brand of Islam in Saudi Arabia, and so he faces marginalization and repression in his homeland.

Another is Bob Fu, an evangelical Christian leader who was arrested in his native China for praying in an unauthorized house-church before finding refuge in the United States and moving to Philadelphia.

Eden Naby, an Assyrian Christian, spoke at our "Christmas under Siege" meeting last month about the accelerating attrition rate of religious minorities fleeing ethnic cleansing and extremism in Iraq,

Seung-Woo Kahng attested to the cruelties suffered by an underground church-leader in North Korea.

Michael Muenir, a Copt originally from Egypt, reported to our group about the failure of Egyptian justice when Copts are murdered by Islamic fanatics, discrimination against the Copts in the upper echelons of government and military, and the obstacles to getting government permission to build or even repair churches in Egypt.

Bat Ye'or, a Jewish author originally from Egypt, spoke of the rising tide of anti-Semitism throughout Europe.

These and many more like them are grateful to have the freedom in the United States to speak out about the need for religious freedom in many countries throughout the world.

When we look at the overall state of religious freedom in the world, state-sponsored religious persecution of the harshest severity—torture, imprisonment, and even death—occurs today under three types of regimes: the remnant communist regimes; repressive Islamist states; and nationalist authoritarian states. Many of the countries represented in these categories are those that have been officially designated by the U.S. State Department as "countries of particular concern," or "CPCs," for their "egregious, systematic, and continuing" violations of religious freedom.

The first type of regime is that of the remnant communist states, such as China, North Korea, and Vietnam. For example:

North Korea systematically crushes public expressions of religion and puts in harsh concentration camps those accused of being religious, along with up to three generations of their family members.

China seeks to control all religion and punishes religious leaders who worship without authorization with fines, "reeducation" camp, and other forms of incarceration. It also harshly treats Falun Gong practitioners, who have reported to us about torture and murder at the hands of authorities.

Vietnam beats and tortures its Hmong and tribal Christians until they recant their faith.

A second main type of regime fostering state-sponsored persecution is that of repressive Islamic states. For example:

In recent years, the Sudanese Government prosecuted a genocidal war in its south in which over 2 million Christians and followers of traditional African religions were killed and thousands enslaved for resisting the forcible imposition of Islamic law. Khartoum is now employing the genocidal tactics honed in the religious conflict with the south in a race-based conflict in its western Darfur region.

Iran's fanatical regime has tortured and killed many thousands of its own nationals for religious reasons. One Iranian political dissident, a Muslim professor named Hashem Aghajari, aptly protested at his July 2004 blas-

phemy trial that he was being punished for "the sin of thinking."

Saudi Arabia continues to indoctrinate its students in an ideology of religious hatred and exports such propaganda to other Muslims communities throughout the world, including here in the United States; Saudi researchers themselves found that the state's curriculum "misguides the pupils into believing that in order to safeguard their own religion, they must violently repress and even physically eliminate the 'other.'"

The third type of regime where religious persecution is prevalent is that of nationalist authoritarian states, such as Burma and Eritrea. For example:

In Burma, the government subjects all publications, including religious publications, to control and censorship. The government generally prohibits outdoor meetings of more than five persons, including religious meetings.

In Eritrea there are reports that police have tortured those detained for their religious beliefs, including using bondage, heat exposure, and beatings. Also, some detainees were required to sign statements repudiating their faith or agreeing not to practice it as a condition for release.

Lastly, we have unfortunately seen a global trend of growing anti-Semitism which has also been brought before our working group. It has been seen in Iran where the President has notoriously denied the Holocaust and threatened the existence of Israel, in the streets of Russia, in the capitals of Europe, and even on the campuses of American universities. The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an abominable anti-Semitic forgery of a Russian czar, is resurfacing at Iranian government-sponsored book fairs, on Egyptian-controlled television broadcasts and in Saudi-published textbooks. This precise work was used by Hitler to indoctrinate Nazi youths. We must take this threat seriously.

Natan Sharansky, himself once a Soviet religious prisoner, a "Jewish refusenik," states that a test of a free society is whether "people have a right to express their views without fear of arrest, imprisonment, or physical harm." None of the CPCs cited above are free societies. It is no coincidence that regimes that pose the gravest threats to our national security—Iran and North Korea today—are also ones that tyrannically crush freedom of belief. The protection and promotion of religious freedom is as fundamental to our national interest, as it is to our ideals.

When we promote religious freedom for these countries and others, when we as members of the Senate speak publicly on religious freedom, when we raise the issue on our trips abroad and in our meetings with foreign officials, when we make sure that members of

the administration and embassy officials around the world raise these values regularly with foreign governments, when we speak on behalf of persecuted dissidents, and when we act consistently in our own country, we will not only be working to ensure every person can worship as they see fit. We will also be ensuring a safer, peaceful, more secure world where the rights of all—the freedoms of all—are respected and celebrated.

RENT RELIEF TO FEDERAL JUDICIARY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I rise to discuss S. 2292, a bill to provide rent relief to the Federal judiciary. Our Federal judges and court administrators have expressed serious concerns about the rental charges assessed by the General Services Administration, GSA, in courthouses and other space occupied by the courts around the country. If enacted, this legislation would require the administrator of general services to charge the judicial branch no more rent than that which represents the actual costs of operating and maintaining its facilities. Specifically, it prohibits the General Services Administration from including amounts for capital costs, real estate taxes, except for those taxes actually paid by the administrator of general services to lessors, or administrative fees in rental charges.

The current budgetary problems caused by the judiciary's rental payments must be addressed. In fiscal terms, since 1986, the Federal Courts' rental payments to GSA have increased from \$133 million to \$912 million. The percentage of the judiciary's operating budget devoted to rent payments has escalated sharply from 15.7 percent in 1986 to about 22 percent in 2004. During this same time, the share of the Federal budget provided to the judiciary has dwindled as Congress has sought to tackle our Nation's increasing budget deficit. Even as overall resources available to the judiciary dwindle, analysts project that rental payments will reach approximately \$1.2 billion by 2009, which will be an estimated 25 percent of the judiciary's annual operating budget.

I believe that the courts are doing everything they possibly can to contain their costs without adversely affecting the administration of justice. The Federal judiciary has imposed a 24-month moratorium on the construction of any new courthouses and has stopped planning for many projects. If rent relief is not granted to the judiciary, more personnel cuts will be required in the near future, including the loss of another 4,000 jobs over the next 4 years.

In my view, this constitutes a near crisis in the Federal judiciary. Space and appropriate personnel play a significant role in our judicial system. The ready availability of appropriate courtrooms, jury deliberation and assembly rooms, and workspace for sup-

port staff all facilitate the administration of justice. Appropriate space for drug testing and monitoring of persons under supervision by Federal probation officers is of the utmost importance. It is critical that the courts have all the tools they need to carry out their mission. Providing this relief to the judiciary will allow them to improve the administration of justice for all Americans.

Additionally, serious building-related security problems in existing courthouses are also a key consideration. Courthouses should have secure passage for detainees to be transported, separating public passageways from these individuals. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many courthouses, including several courthouses in my home state of Texas. As an example, I recently wrote to Attorney General Gonzales to urge him to ensure that funding is granted to fix security concerns identified at the Midland Federal Courthouse as soon as possible. Affording the judiciary rent relief so they can devote more money to courthouse security is a good first step.

Finally, I think it is important to point out that this bill addresses the unequal treatment generally afforded the lower Federal courts. Many of the buildings used by other agencies and branches of the Federal Government are exempt from rent. For example, the Department of Defense pays no rent to GSA on the Pentagon or on military bases. The Treasury Department, which once housed GSA, pays no rent on the main Treasury building or on its Mints. The Supreme Court—unlike the lower Federal courts—pays no rent. Likewise, the Federal Reserve Board, the FDIC, and many other quasi-federal agencies do not pay rent to GSA. There is no rent paid on Federal prisons, embassies, NIH facilities, nuclear facilities, VA hospitals, EPA labs, or national parks and national forest facilities. Congress does not pay rent on the Capitol Building we're deliberating in today. Nor does Congress pay rent on the Senate or House office buildings or surrounding structures. Congress is charged rent by GSA only for a small amount of space for congressional State and district offices. The Federal judiciary—specifically, the lower Federal courts—lack that same advantage. This bill takes a step towards granting the judiciary equal treatment.

It is important that all who enter our Nation's courts are ensured fair and equitable treatment. This bill is a critical component in achieving this goal. I will work with Senator SPECTER and the other co-sponsors to get this bill moving through the judiciary committee as soon as possible.

PROVIDING RELIEF FOR THE FEDERAL JUDICIARY FROM EXCESSIVE RENT CHARGES

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, yesterday Chairman SPECTER introduced a bill I cosponsored to provide relief for

the Federal judiciary from excessive rent charges assessed by the General Services Administration, GSA, for the use of courthouses and other spaces occupied by the courts across the Nation. Since 1986, the Federal courts' rental payments to GSA have increased dramatically, with the percentage of the judiciary's operating budget devoted to rent payments escalating from 15.7 percent in 1986 to approximately 22 percent in 2004. If no changes are made, this percentage is expected to continue to rise sharply. This legislation brings these rent charges under control by capping the rent charges at GSA's actual costs of operating and maintaining accommodations provided to the judicial branch, by specifying that certain capital costs, taxes, and administrative fees shall not be included in GSA's rent charges, and by establishing a means for repayment over time for the future costs of repair and alteration projects performed by GSA.

As the ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I have been concerned about the adverse effect of these rent payments on the administration of justice. On May 13, 2005, a bipartisan group of 11 members of the Judiciary Committee, including Chairman SPECTER and myself, sent a letter to GSA asking it to exercise its authority to exempt the judicial branch from all rental payments except those required to operate and maintain Federal court buildings and related costs. GSA's response has not been adequate. As set forth in that letter, the excessive rent paid by the judiciary will exacerbate severe personnel shortages by forcing more cuts and could also have impacts on courthouse security. The rent relief provided in this bill will help ensure that the judiciary continues to have the tools it needs to carry out its unique and vital function.

KATRINA ON THE GROUND

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina tore through the gulf coast States leaving in its wake death and destruction that none of us will soon forget. In the immediate aftermath, graphic images of people struggling to escape the flooding in New Orleans and digging through the rubble of their homes in Mississippi and Alabama filled our television sets and newspapers. People were outraged at the Government's response. They volunteered their time to aid in rescues. They donated their money to help the victims. But many soon moved on.

The problems faced by the residents of the gulf coast, however, have not gone away. Rebuilding is underway, but it will take years. We cannot forget the work that still needs to be done or the people who are still struggling.

That is why I am so impressed with a new volunteer initiative called Katrina on the Ground. Katrina on the Ground, or KOTG, will bring together students from across the country to help rebuild